

# U.S.-Russia ABM Every Day of

By Chalmers M. Roberts

Washington Post Staff Writer

The United States and the Soviet Union now are embarked on negotiations affecting the most sensitive of military and psychological relationships between the world's two super-powers.

These are the Moscow talks on offensive and defensive missiles, talks initiated by the United States because it discovered last year that the Soviet Union had begun deployment of one and perhaps two new anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems.

The issues involved are loaded with potential political dynamite for the 1968 presidential campaign.

The Republicans already have indicated a clear awareness of this by publishing a National Committee pamphlet bearing this label: "The Missile Defense Question—Is LBJ Right?—Russia Deploys Anti-Missile

## News Analysis

Network; U.S. Refuses to Keep Pace."

But even more is involved than what Michigan's GOP presidential prospect, Gov. George Romney, has called a possible "ABM gap." There are those at both the Pentagon and in the Congress who fear the talks could lead to abandonment of a long-held principle: That United States security requires an overwhelming weight of American nuclear missile power compared to that of the Soviet Union.

Currently the United States has a better than 3-to-1 lead in land- and sea-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). As of last Oct. 1, the figures were 1446 to 470, according to Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara.

Exactly what President Johnson and McNamara will be prepared to do in the talks has yet to be decided.

Washington is well aware of its own internal disagreements, and of the pressures certain to be generated by what former President Eisenhower once called the "military-industrial complex." Washington also is aware that the Soviet Union's civilian leadership, rated here as rather weak, has to contend with conservative defense-minded military leaders who battle against every effort to pare the Soviet defense budget.

If the American position is not yet clear, the Soviet position is becoming increasingly evident. Soviet hopes relate to just those changes in American strategic thinking that raise alarm bells here at home.

From the Kremlin's viewpoint, what is involved is both psychological and military. Any potential agreement most likely would have to consummate a much cherished Soviet objective: To force an admission from the United States that the Soviet Union is its equal in the most critical of great power terms, nuclear military strength.

An adjunct to this Soviet objective is Moscow's hope for a mitigation if not an

actual end to the 3-to-1 American missile advantage.

Both nations know that the ICBM figures are far from a complete measure of raw power and that because of differing defense needs and attitudes numerical parity is both impossible and meaningless. But it is beyond doubt that the Soviets hope for an agreement that would materially alter the current ratio.

The way the negotiations have gotten under way helps make this evident.

After disclosing last Nov. 10 that the Soviets had begun a new ABM deployment, the Administration let it be known it would try first for an agreement with Moscow before embarking on an American ABM deployment.

On Jan. 26 in his annual posture statement to Congress McNamara argued that deployment of rival systems would not, in the end, produce "any gain in real security for either side." He estimated that a full scale ABM deployment would cost the United States around \$40 billion over 10 years while the Soviet Union would have to spend at least \$20 to \$25 billion.

The next day President Johnson wrote Soviet Premier Kosygin suggesting talks on the ABM issue. Before he replied in March 1, Kosygin said publicly in London that ABMs were purely defensive and hinted clearly that Moscow would require a link in any talks with offensive missiles. He did so in his letter and by then the United States was fully prepared to agree.

On March 23 American Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson met Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in Moscow to discuss the mechanics of the talks. They agreed to begin in Moscow but when Thompson suggested that the first order of business might be to have experts sit down together, Gromyko gave no direct response.

Instead the Soviet Union let it be known that it was up to the United States, as the initiator of the talks, to outline its own proposals

Thus the stage is set for many months of talk, not just on freezing ABM deployment as the United States would like but also on alterations in the basic U.S.-U.S.S.R. missile power.

Already the Senate Armed Services Committee has warned that "it would

be unwise to permit these negotiations to extend interminably." If there is no agreement, the committee said in a report, the United States should begin procurement for ABM deployment.

In Washington optimists about an agreement are hard to find. But there are

some working on the problem who think it possible. Some consider the talks a critical point in any effort to halt and turn down the arms race. But everyone realizes that time is pressing if agreement is to be reached on such a complicated and highly sensitive problem.